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Practical Pluralism in Teacher Education

After reviewing the recent history of the effects of educational movements upon teacher education, Dean Andrews arrives at the present point where there is no longer any single agreed version of what the future of schools will be. He outlines the response to this situation of the Faculty of Education at the University of British Columbia: a wide range of alternative programs that have been offered in the past year or two, in order to effect change "on a broken front". He discusses the problems arising from this pluralistic response to the demands of a pluralistic society, conspicuous among which is the need for mutual tolerance of widely differing philosophical bases of action.

As a group, those involved in preparing teachers for our schools are probably no more masochistic than anyone else, yet we continually engage in self-flagellation over the gap between present practice and what might be. Part of the reason stems from our awareness of the social impact of what we do. Part also results from the openness of our options. The knowledge base is so weak and the value elements so crucial that no one can with any validity claim to know the best way to prepare teachers. Nor can anyone's claim be denied on other than argumentative grounds. Still another reason for our self-flagellation is that in the face of all these uncertainties most of us are aware that the causes for our present programs lie in the accumulated orthodoxies of our institutions more than in any coherent response to present conditions. Thus as we look for improvement it is instructive to look to the major movements in education in the recent past as a means of understanding many of the legacies in our present programs. On this basis some conclusions may be warranted about which elements of the tradition are anachronistic and which are still vital. The review may also point to future directions, if only through avoidance of past failures.

Let me retrace, then, the route by which we have arrived at this point. In doing so I will focus upon the major movements affecting the public schools and will later come to the implications of these movements for teacher education. Any such brief description is vastly over-simplified, but I hope not misleadingly so.

Present day schools are still profoundly affected by the consequences of the progressive education movement. Dominating as it did the 1930's and 40's, this movement sought to make a clean sweep of the old traditions of elementary and secondary schooling. It sought to replace the old Dickensian school, which still persisted to that day, with more humane treatment of students and more functional curriculum. It sought to replace learning under threat by learning for pleasure. Ironically, while this movement had its basis in Dewey's philosophy of pragmatism it soon took on the characteristics almost of a religion of education. There was a highly developed doctrine, a clearly identifiable set of high priests, a distinct flavour of anti-intellectualism, a strong evangelical thrust and a condescending and somewhat hostile view of the unbeliever. Despite my antipathy to a doctrinaire approach to education I would concede that this movement accomplished many important improvements in the schools. One of the weaknesses of a doctrine, however, is that it tends not to be self-correcting in the light of experience, and this proved to be its downfall. The movement was naively optimistic about human nature, as shown by that central point in its doctrine "remove the shackles and *let* the child develop". Many shackles were indeed removed, but to the surprise of those in the movement and the dismay of the general public, the children did not automatically develop as it was thought they should. Instead, in many cases, they simply became less educated and less disciplined, and replaced their previous fear with boredom.

Beginning in the early 1950's pressure from the general public and groups of dissident educators caused a sharp reaction against progressive education. The reaction began in the academic community with books like Hilda Neatby's "So Little For the Mind", and was shortly reinforced by the surge of national panic following the Russian launching of Sputnik. Many of the reforms of the progressive education period were retained, but there was a marked swing back to hard work and achievement in traditional academic subjects.

The present: "pragmatic humanism"

There never has been any clear-cut end to the reaction period. Rather it just faded away as cold war conditions changed and a variety of social factors emerged which placed new demands upon the schools. The period we are now in had no definite starting point, and its nature is difficult to describe. It might somewhat vaguely be described as a period of pragmatic humanism. Certainly it is pragmatic in that new practices and programs in the schools are tried out without regard to their philosophical roots. Indeed philosophy or philosophers play little part in shaping the current educational scene, with directions being determined largely by what seems to make sense under the circumstances. It is humanistic in that there is a strong emphasis on the personal development of the child, intellectually, socially and physically, and a strong emphasis upon the use of education as the means of solving or helping to solve a wide variety of social problems. Oscillations in

emphasis have continued, from hard to soft or from more pragmatic to more humanistic. The present hard-line emphasis, however, already seems to be losing some of its momentum and may well prove to be more a tide than a continuing current.

The lesson of the progressive education era seems to have been well learned. It is no longer a matter of removing the shackles to *let* the child develop. Rather it is a search for new kinds of carefully designed programs, so that the child will develop better after the so-called shackles are removed than before. Furthermore, since the word "better" is defined only in common sense terms by different individuals there is a highly pluralistic array of innovations underway.

One cannot understand a modern teacher education program unless one sees it as being somewhat on the way toward living down the legacy of the progressive education era. Teacher education was in its glory in those days. It was the very focal point of the cult. The schools had to be changed so totally that, in the view of teacher educators, the main strategy had to be to bring up a new generation of teachers in an entirely different mold. These new teachers would gradually take over the schools, and the desired change would thus be effected. The faculty members had a relatively clear view of what schools should be like and attempted to train teachers to teach in the ideal school, even though such schools did not yet exist. Accordingly the teacher education program was heavily course-oriented. Practice teaching in the schools was not a major element of the program, and although some practice was obviously necessary, it tended to be supervised and guided by faculty members rather than by teachers in the schools. In many places model schools were developed as a means of at least approximating the ideal.

This kind of teacher education program, whose purpose was to bring up a new generation of teachers differently from existing teachers, is one which had to be lived down for a variety of reasons. In the first place it simply did not work. A beginning teacher is the least likely person on a school staff to be effective as a change agent. All the pressures are for him or her to conform to the style of teaching practised in the school. Indeed most beginning teachers are taken aside by an older colleague and told to forget all that stuff you learned in teacher training and learn how to do it right. By this of course is meant, "Learn how to do it the way we do it in the schools." Not only was it ineffective in bringing about change, then, but it was objected to by student teachers, practising teachers, and employers. Student teachers found that they were ill prepared for the orthodox teaching they were called upon to do and thus criticized the program as being irrelevant. With this judgment their employers agreed. Practising teachers saw the program as "ivory tower" and deplored the gulf which inevitably grew between the teacher training institution and teachers in the schools. The university community protested, furthermore, because what they perceived as a program of indoctrination was considered to be incompatible with the intellectual ideals of the university.

Practice teaching and pluralism

While course content is now quite different, many of the basic forms of the early programs still remain. Similarly many of the critical attitudes on the part of outsiders remain. So teacher education now is in a transition period. In place of the overall strategy of bringing up a new generation of teachers differently, most programs are now recognizing two needs: to train students to be good teachers the way teaching is presently done in good schools; and to provide them with the kind of background which will enable them to branch out into innovative styles of teaching after they have mastered the orthodox art. Since there is no longer any single version of what the future of schools will be, the background provided should include a study of the wide variety of present innovative practices in schools, a study of the techniques of developing new curriculum, and an acquaintance with theory and research in the field of education. Essentially the version of the future must be pluralistic rather than doctrinairely singular.

In program terms this means a much heavier emphasis on practice teaching or internship than has been the case in the past. As far as the remaining course work is concerned it means emphasizing, on the one hand, practical material directly related to the student teaching experience and, on the other, academic study of what is relatively stable knowledge in education and the relevant social sciences and humanities. It also means a new kind of relationship between the Faculty of Education and the schools. Practising teachers are given more responsibility in the practical parts of the teacher education program, and professors are more involved in cooperative projects with practising teachers in developing new curricula and other kinds of new school programs.

I now turn to a description of our efforts at the University of British Columbia over the last four years to improve our teacher preparation programs. Previous attempts had been made to transform the whole program in one massive stroke, but this had not come to fruition; with 260 faculty members and 4000 students a complete program change was clearly too much to cope with. As a result it was decided by the Faculty to effect change on a broken front, a decision which took the form of developing alternative programs.

Initially the concept of alternative programs was vague at best. The regular program already made extensive provision for student choices. There existed a basic choice between the elementary and secondary Bachelor of Education programs and within each of these an array of both academic and professional specializations. Moreover for both elementary and secondary teaching there was a one-year program of the consecutive type for graduates of other faculties. Choices between concurrent and sequential programs between grade levels, and between subject specializations, however, could hardly be regarded as choices between alternative programs in the sense in which we wished to use the term. What we needed were different approaches to teacher preparation,

ways of breaking out of the mould of course work in standard subjects interspersed periodically with student teaching.

No one best way

As the concept grew, its underlying assumptions became more focused. We took it as given that within a certain range there is no one *best* way to educate teachers. People call a program "good" if it reflects their own particular views on teacher education. For a student a good program must be compatible with his or her particular learning style. For a professor or a sponsor teacher it must be appropriate to his or her teaching style. For an employer a good program must produce a teacher who meets his or her own criteria of what constitutes a good teacher. Since we live in a pluralistic society, it was felt, there is every reason to be pluralistic in our provision of teacher education.

In keeping with the spirit of the concept it was regarded as inappropriate to develop pluralism through some process of central determination. Rather an invitation was issued for members of faculty to design and propose their own views of an ideal program. The response was substantial, both in numbers and in quality. Nine proposals were received, refined through interaction between the proposers and a screening mechanism, and ultimately approved by the Faculty for implementation the following year.

The approval process itself provided an interesting dilemma. It was generally agreed that it was inappropriate to object to a proposed new program on the grounds that it did violence to your own personal convictions about teacher education. On what grounds, then, could one object? What criteria could be used for approval? It must be reported that this problem never was resolved in a conceptual way. The philosophical positions expressed in the program proposals were accepted without successful challenge simply on the grounds that they represented the considered views of colleagues. This degree of tolerance and trust was, of course, absolutely essential to the development of program pluralism. In practice the effective criteria which were applied related mostly to feasibility: student and faculty load, cost per student, availability of cooperating schools and the like.

An alternative program could include all the years of a degree program or could include just the professional year. By *professional year* is meant a year in which a student focuses entirely on work under the control of the Faculty of Education. Such a year occurs in the B.Ed. Elementary program at the third year level and in the B.Ed. Secondary program at the fifth year level. The one-year programs for graduates of other faculties for both elementary and secondary teaching are also professional years.

As it happened, only one of the proposed alternative programs spanned all the years of a degree program. The other eight were alternative ways

of doing a professional year. The main reasons for this appeared to be that the professional year is the most crucial part of learning to be a teacher, that it is also the most controversial part of the program, that most proposers wanted a self-contained team for the conduct of their program, and, of course, that re-design of a single year is complex enough without going beyond. The one multi-year program was the Native Indian Teacher Education Program (NITEP) which required re-design of most of the degree program to serve its purposes adequately.

A review of problems

Despite the general aura of success with the programs a number of problems have emerged. Let me mention some of these.

To our surprise there has sometimes been difficulty in recruiting students to fill some of the programs. It is gratifying, however, to discover that those who do opt in usually talk with enthusiasm about the experience.

Another major problem which accompanies all innovations is the tendency of organizations, like organisms, to set up resistances to such foreign intrusions so as to return to their former state. The cycle of fads in education is ample testimony to the fact that while it may be difficult to introduce innovations it is even more difficult to keep them. I mention this problem not because of any backlash of faculty opinion, which has not occurred. It has simply taken a great deal of energy to create and implement the alternative programs and it takes continuing energy to sustain them.

Related to the above point, but on a more specific level, it must be observed that the alternative programs are mechanically and administratively a nuisance in many ways. They simply do not fit the pattern and continually require special attention. This applies to such things as budgeting, room scheduling, student-teaching placements, student course programs, the weekly schedules of faculty members, and the like. No doubt many of these matters could be institutionalized so that they either fit or become the pattern. On the other hand the inherent pluralism involved in such programs will always require more organizational flexibility than a traditional program does.

Another problem area concerns staffing. Faculty members are highly committed though often overloaded because of the increased personalization of the program. With 20% of the total faculty involved, there have occasionally been disputes with departments over who can be released. Some programs must hire people with special talents whose backgrounds do not fit the university pattern. Original designers of programs are sometimes hard to replace, particularly when a program has a strong individualistic stamp on it. These and other related problems

have arisen and have been handled with varying degrees of success. Some remain as important difficulties still awaiting solution.

A review of benefits

The alternative programs have nevertheless been extremely beneficial. Participating students and faculty members have been strongly enthusiastic. Teachers in participating schools, though often feeling overworked, are usually strong supporters of the partnership which has developed between them and the university. Teachers throughout the province have shifted significantly toward a more positive view of the Faculty. Indeed, the alternative programs have provided a re-vitalization for the whole Faculty which would have been difficult to obtain in other ways. Other changes undertaken during the same period — in the regular program, in field development, and in graduate studies — have been of major importance, but it has been the alternative programs which have spearheaded the vitality by creating an atmosphere of change.

The most important single contribution of the alternative program is, in my view, the provision of a number of ways by which the old theory-practice divorce can be solved. Students and teachers for generations have lamented the seeming irrelevance of the course-work element of teacher education. Some universities in recent years have responded to that judgment by virtually abandoning theory as they make their practica longer and longer. We did not want to give in so easily. In a variety of different ways we have carried the theory into the classroom. Any irrelevance becomes so obvious to all concerned that its elimination follows naturally. Professors and sponsor teachers form a partnership in working with students which enables each to contribute what he or she is best able to do and keeps each current in the skills and knowledge of the other.

Another major advantage of the alternative programs is that they are highly personal in relationships. Learning to teach effectively is a personal matter and requires strong supportive relationships among students and between them and their professors and sponsor teachers. The alternative programs develop such support both because they are small in size and also because of their innovative spirit. Thus the warmth of friends is fuelled by a sense of adventure in something new, and even of partisanship in the conviction that their program is superior to others. And who are we as educators to sneeze at cultivation of the Hawthorne Effect?

Now that we have these programs what are we going to do with them? Many possibilities have been studied and debated. First, we do not want the growing edge of the program to become simply a new orthodoxy. Therefore we should expect and encourage some terminations and some new births. Yet we do not want a permanent division of the total program into a traditional part and an innovative part. One of our purposes was to achieve change on a broken front, and to that end it is

necessary to extend the rule of impermanence and the spirit of adventure to the regular programs. The best way to do this, in our view, is to break the so-called regular programs into as many sub-programs as possible, then to consider the array of traditional sub-programs, together with the present alternative programs, as a large number of options all on the same footing. In this way we institutionalize the present alternative programs somewhat, and de-institutionalize the present regular programs somewhat. Each of the traditional sub-programs, then, will be subject to survival on its own merits. At the same time the creative improvement of each will be a practical possibility. A group of faculty members can work on one chunk with some hope of success, whereas attempts to tackle the whole thing would involve such enormous complexity that the status quo begins to look better and better. In this way we hope to be able to translate good intentions into positive action. We hope to avoid continuing to be frustrated by those mysterious organizational forces which tend to freeze the status quo into perpetual existence.

NOTE

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